

## City of Alexandria, Virginia

## MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 22, 2004

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF A REQUEST TO PERMIT AN EXCEPTION TO THE MAJOR EVENTS POLICY TO ALLOW THE ADDITION OF UP TO SEVEN VENUES EAST OF WASHINGTON STREET FOR FIRST NIGHT ALEXANDRIA

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**ISSUE:** City Council consideration of a request to permit an exception to the Major Events Policy to allow the addition of up to seven venues east of Washington Street for First Night Alexandria.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That City Council permit an exception to the Major Events Policy to allow for the addition of up to seven First Night Alexandria venues east of Washington Street. Each venue would be subject to City Manager approval. This recommendation is in response to a request by First Night Alexandria to permit additional venues for their annual New Year's Eve celebration, and is supported by the Old Town Civic Association.

**BACKGROUND:** The City's policy on City-endorsed major events, adopted by Council in May 1986 and modified a number of times since then, limits major events held in the Old Town (defined as lying east of Washington Street) area to every other weekend, and prohibits the addition of new major events in Old Town without prior City Council approval (Attachment). This limitation derived primarily from concerns of City residents living east of Washington Street who felt that they were being inundated by traffic and crowds generated by special events.

First Night Alexandria, a non-alcoholic New Year's Eve celebration, was first held in 1994. In its first year, a total of 24 performance sites were provided along Washington Street from Duke Street to Queen Street and along King Street, west of Washington Street to the George Washington Masonic Temple. Approximately 4,500 individuals attended this family-oriented event in its first year.

In 1996 and 1997, First Night requested an exception to the Major Events Policy for the purpose of holding performances east of Washington Street because of the success and popularity of the program. City Council approved the exception and permitted First Night Alexandria to hold performances at specific venues east of Washington Street. First in 1996, one specific site (the

then Crestar Bank at 515 King) was permitted and then in 1997 four specific sites (Market Square, Alexandria City Courthouse, and Gadsby's Tavern Museum were permitted, in addition to the Crestar Bank site). In 2001 First Night added the Little Theatre as a site and in 2002 expanded also to the Old Presbyterian Meeting House. Both of these sites are east of Washington Street and were not officially authorized by Council as exceptions to the Major Events Policy (not a situation that First Night nor City staff realized at the time).

For 2003, First Night Alexandria, Inc. requested an exception to the Major Events Policy to permit four sites east of Washington Street. This was in addition to 19 other sites in the City. This expansion was in part a follow up to a meeting in the fall of 2002 of the Old Town Business Association where a request for expansion of First Night to the lower King Street area was articulated. The venues requested by First Night for 2003 included the Old Presbyterian Meeting House, Little Theatre, the Torpedo Factory and the Art League. A fifth site on Washington Street was planned, but the operator of that site withdrew at the last minute. At the request of First Night, the City Manager authorized, on an emergency basis and subject to the informal approval of the immediate surrounding neighbors, The Athenaeum was approved as the substitute site.

First Night would have expanded to a few more additional sites in the lower King Street area, but as a pilot program expansion and in reaction to initial concerns of the Old Town Civic Association, First Night agreed to limit their expansion in 2003. The Torpedo Factory site was obtained by City staff by using New Year's Eve as one of the allowed use nights set aside for the City in the City's lease with the Torpedo Factory Artists Association.

First Night Alexandria is a way of promoting the City as an arts and cultural venue and encouraging tourists and residents of the Washington D. C. metropolitan area to visit Old Town and shop and dine during the event or return to the City at another time. Last year First Night attracted approximately 10,000 persons and received extensive regional media coverage. For 2004, First Night Alexandria will again arrange for parking and free DASH Bus service. First Night is also planning to expand to the Mt. Vernon Avenue area for 2004. City staff expects that there will be no disruption to traffic and parking in the Old Town area. The use of Metrorail is also encouraged by First Night Alexandria.

The pilot experimentation by First Night of using five sites east of Washington Street was a success, and First Night wishes to have authorization for up to seven sites for 2004 and beyond. Given the fact that sites can change (due to a change in a site owner's or operator's use decision) up to the last minute, it is recommended that the City Council make the exception authorization generic and leave the decision to the City Manager based on a City Special Events Committee recommendation. This also makes it not necessary to seek annual City Council authorization.

The Special Events Committee supports this request because every First Night Alexandria event since its inception in 1994 has been well planned and well organized, and the organizers have worked successfully with City staff to meet all the requirements set forth by the City to hold the events. These requirements include providing additional parking spaces, encouraging the use of

Metrobus, and providing free shuttle bus service between performance sites and parking areas. In addition, First Night Alexandria hires and pays for the appropriate number of additional police officers to provide the necessary support for this family-oriented event which features diverse entertainment and fireworks at the Masonic Temple.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** As has been the practice in the past, all out of pocket costs associated with City support on New Year's Eve for First Night activities will be paid by First Night Alexandria. First Night receives support from the City's Marketing Fund. For 2004, the Marketing Committee will likely provide matching funds. For 2003, the Marketing Fund provided \$28,850 to First Night.

**ATTACHMENTS:** Major Events Policy

**STAFF:**

Mark Jinks, Assistant City Manager

Kirk Kincannon, Director, Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

Janet Barnett, Deputy Director, Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

## GUIDELINES FOR SPONSORING MAJOR EVENTS IN OLD TOWN ALEXANDRIA

City of Alexandria  
Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

### Introduction

To ensure that major events in Old Town are scheduled on an orderly basis and do not intrude unduly upon the merchants and residents of this unique section of the City, the Alexandria City Council established policies and procedures for organizations wishing to sponsor such events in Old Town in June 1986. These policies and procedures were revised by City Council in June 1994 to become effective January 1, 1995.

The scheduling of these events is the responsibility of the City's Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities.

For purposes of these policies and procedures, Old Town is defined as that portion of the City lying east of Washington Street, bordered by Oronoco Bay Park and Jones Point Park. Locations include Jones Point Park, Market Square, Oronoco Bay Park and Waterfront Park. A major event is defined as any event, including races and parades, held on City property and open to the public, which attracts 500 people or more.

### Policies

1. Major events in Old Town will be scheduled no more frequently than every other weekend.
2. Beginning January 1, 1995, all major events scheduled in 1994 will automatically continue the same schedule through December 31, 1998, unless an existing organization decides to not hold an event. Should a vacancy occur, a new group may apply to schedule an event on the vacant date (see below). Organizations will be notified each September regarding their date for the following calendar year. Organizations may exchange dates among themselves.
3. The Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities maintains a waiting list (on a first-come, first-served basis) for groups wanting to schedule an event in Old Town during the next five years. When an existing group no longer holds an event in Old Town, the group at the top of the waiting list is considered to be scheduled in its place. Organizations giving up their scheduled event, could reapply by placing their name on the waiting list. To obtain a waiting list request form, please call 838-4343.

Registration for new and existing organizations to apply to sponsor a major event in Old Town for the five-year period commencing January 1, 1999, will be held on September 10, 1998. Securing a date does not constitute final approval to hold the event. The event will be reviewed by the Special Events Committee before final approval is given to hold the event.

4. Each event is evaluated by the City's Special Events Committee to determine what City services are required to hold the event and the costs associated with these requirements. Requirements may include police protection, park rental, business licenses, health permits and insurance certification.
5. The number of races in Old Town are limited to five. These races are the Run vs. Row Race, the Colin Casey Fun Run, the George Washington Classic, the D.C. Roadrunners Race and the Bar Association Race.
6. Groups are limited to one-day events only, except for those groups currently sponsoring approved two or three day events.
7. Activities at Market Square must conclude by 7:00 p.m. except for City-sponsored events which may be scheduled after 7:00 p.m.
8. Events sponsored by for-profit organizations (commercial) are limited to one per year.
9. Any organization which has approval to sponsor a major event in Old Town under these policies, and wishes to sell and/or serve alcoholic beverages, must obtain a Virginia ABC permit and all other appropriate permits.
10. Private events to which the public is not invited are exempt from these policies.

#### **Information**

Information and waiting list request forms may be obtained from:

Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities  
1108 Jefferson Street  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314  
(703) 838-4343